



Psicología Iberoamericana  
ISSN: 1405-0943  
revista.psicologia@ibero.mx  
Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de México  
México

## Coronavirus and mental health: What are the consequences?

---

**Gordon, Sarah Frances**


Coronavirus and mental health: What are the consequences?

Psicología Iberoamericana, vol. 28, no. 1, 2020

Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de México, México

**Available in:** <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=133963198001>

## Coronavirus and mental health: What are the consequences?

Sarah Frances Gordon [sarah.gordon@ibero.mx](mailto:sarah.gordon@ibero.mx)  
*Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, México*  
 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5131-8519>

Psicología Iberoamericana, vol. 28, no. 1,  
2020

Universidad Iberoamericana, Ciudad de  
México, México

Redalyc: [https://www.redalyc.org/  
articulo.oa?id=133963198001](https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=133963198001)

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which is believed to have originated in a wet market[1] in Wuhan, Hubei province, China at the end of 2019, has spread throughout the world (Xiang et al., 2020). On the 28th of February, Mexico confirmed its first cases of coronavirus in two men who had recently travelled to Italy (Perla & Morales, 2020) and as of the 8th of May 2020, as stated on the government website, Mexico has nearly 30,000 coronavirus cases and nearly 3,000 confirmed deaths from coronavirus ('COVID-19 Tablero México - CONACYT - CentroGeo - GeoInt - DataLab', n.d.).[2] These numbers are expected to increase, and as a result, the Mexican government has shut down sections of the economy and asked the public to stay at home to help 'flatten the curve' and stop the spread of further infections. Globally, there are nearly four million confirmed cases in 187 countries and approximately 270,000 people have died from COVID-19[3] (BBC, 2020).

As the cases of COVID-19 increase both internationally and in Mexico, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other health authorities across the globe have recommended measures such as social distancing and quarantines to combat the infectious disease (Shah et al., 2020). However, measures such as social distancing and quarantines, which are stressful in and of itself also involve the government shutting down sections of the economy in the interests of public health, leading to a lot of people being unable to work and generate an income. This leads to anxiety and fear amongst the general population, which is also combined with the growing concerns we have for the well-being and health of our children, elderly family members and those with high-risk conditions and suppressed immune systems. The palpable feeling of fear and anxiety being experienced by all of us now make the connection between mental health and the coronavirus seem obvious.

There is a growing amount of academic literature on the relationship between mental health risks and COVID-19. Much of it is from Asia, namely China (Kang, Li, et al., 2020; Kang, Ma, et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Xiang et al., 2020), Japan (Shigemura et al., 2020), South Korea (Park & Park, 2020), but there are also other contributions from South America (Lima et al., 2020; Torales et al., 2020), Europe

(Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020; Wind et al., 2020), and India (Shah et al., 2020). These studies all highlight the mental health risks that frontline workers face, in particular medical staff, as well as how the general population is also affected since we are all being subjected to massive quarantines and public transport closures.

Research shows that home quarantines are linked to psychological stress and pose a danger to mental health (Shah et al., 2020). Barbisch et al., (2015) found in her study on the role of quarantine in combatting infectious diseases such as SARS and Ebola, that placing populations under quarantine can lead to severe psychological distress, made worse by the fear and uncertainty of the diseases. Furthermore, confining individuals to small spaces for prolonged periods under the threat of contracting a disease can lead to mass panic and the disintegration of one's mental health (Barbisch et al., 2015). This was observed in hospital staff who were under quarantine when treating SARS in a hospital in Taipei, Taiwan and found that this type of confinement drove staff to extreme measures such as suicide.

Increased loneliness and reduced social interactions are also risk factors for psychological disorders such as schizophrenia and major depression (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015) found in their meta-analytical review of literature on the subject of loneliness and social isolation, that isolation leads to higher mortality and poses a greater risk to individual health than obesity does. Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015) argue that in light of this research, social isolation should be presented as an important public health issue. This is certainly true now in the times of the Coronavirus, where quarantines are commonplace and social distancing is encouraged. The psychological implications of placing people under home-quarantine combined with concerns about one's health and the health of their family, as well as uncertainty about one's future and economic situation, may generate or exacerbate feelings of anxiety, depression and fear (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). Taking all of this into account there should be a shift towards emphasizing mental health globally and locally amid this pandemic.

As psychologists and mental health workers, we should prepare ourselves for this new challenge as more and more importance is being placed on mental health. The priorities of the general population are changing as the pandemic represents a relatively new major stressor in their lives and the number of those who will need psychological intervention will increase in the coming weeks and months (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). We should expect an increase of mental health problems and substance-abuse disorders in the general population as extreme stressors such as loss of income, fear, illness in the family, social isolation, and anxiety, may exacerbate or generate psychiatric conditions (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020).

Shah et al. (2020, p. 4) suggest that to order to avoid the mental health effects of the COVID-19 infection, "people need to avoid excessive exposure to COVID-19 media coverages, maintain a healthy diet and positive lifestyle, and reach out to others for comfort". People should

try to limit the source of stress and rely on a limited amount of official information from official channels (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). Increasing communication with family, friends and loved ones through video-chats and phone calls are also important to help break the negative consequences associated with social isolation (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). Developing a routine and daily rhythm is also helpful as it communicates a sense of normalcy to your body. The WHO recommends a combination of regular physical activity, healthy eating and increased awareness of your mental health to combat the stress of the coronavirus (WHO, 2020). Trying to focus on the benefits of this time can also be useful, such as remembering to be grateful for the increased quality time with your family, children and partner (Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020). Also, it is important to ask for professional help if you feel you are not coping and to seek out mental health services.

As mental health professionals and researchers, we need to chart a way forward and accept that the world has changed and therefore we need to change. We need to understand that more and more people are now at greater risk of developing psychiatric problems because of the introduction of new stressors and we must be ready to deal with this. Most importantly, we must address the stigma attached to mental health problems that exist in Mexico and encourage open discussions about mental health in our communities, as well as an increased awareness regarding monitoring one's mental health regularly.

## Footnotes

[1] A wet market is a marketplace selling fresh meat, fish, produce, and other perishable goods, at affordable prices and should not be confused with wildlife markets in China and Asia, which trade in live and exotic animals (Beech, 2020; Yu, 2020). Water is regularly thrown on produce to keep it fresh and melting ice is commonly used as a cooling technique for fish (Beech, 2020; Yu, 2020). This is where the term 'wet market' is from.

[2] These statistics have been called into dispute as many health workers and Mexico City officials suspect that the federal government is not reporting hundreds or even thousands of coronavirus deaths, as well as underreporting coronavirus cases in Mexico (Azam, 2020).

[3] These numbers may have increased by the time this article has gone to print and were recorded on the 8th of May 2020.

## References

- Azam, A. (2020, May 8). Hidden toll: Mexico ignores wave of Coronavirus deaths in capital. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/08/world/americas/mexico-coronavirus-count.html>
- Barbisch, D., Koenig, K. L., & Shih, F.-Y. (2015). Is there a case for quarantine? Perspectives from SARS to Ebola. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 9(5), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2015.38>

- BBC. (2020, May 8). Coronavirus pandemic: Tracking the global outbreak. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51235105>
- Beech, P. (2020). What are China's wet markets? *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/china-wet-markets-covid19-coronavirus-explained/>
- COVID-19 Tablero México - CONACYT - CentroGeo - GeoInt - DataLab. (n.d.). Retrieved 8 May 2020, from <https://coronavirus.gob.mx/datos/>
- Fiorillo, A., & Gorwood, P. (2020, April 1). The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and implications for clinical practice. *European Psychiatry: The Journal of the Association of European Psychiatrists*. NLM (Medline). <https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2020.35>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
- Kang, L., Li, Y., Hu, S., Chen, M., Yang, C., Yang, B. X., ... Liu, Z. (2020). The mental health of medical workers in Wuhan, China dealing with the 2019 novel coronavirus. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(3), e14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30047-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30047-X)
- Kang, L., Ma, S., Chen, M., Yang, J., Wang, Y., Li, R., ... Liu, Z. (2020). Impact on mental health and perceptions of psychological care among medical and nursing staff in Wuhan during the 2019 novel coronavirus disease outbreak: A cross-sectional study. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.03.028>
- Lai, J., Ma, S., Wang, Y., Cai, Z., Hu, J., Wei, N., ... Hu, S. (2020). Associated with mental health outcomes among health care workers. *JAMA Network Open*, 3(3), 203976. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.3976>
- Li, W., Yang, Y., Liu, Z. H., Zhao, Y. J., Zhang, Q., Zhang, L., ... Xiang, Y. T. (2020). Progression of mental health services during the COVID-19 outbreak in China. *International Journal of Biological Sciences*, 16(10), 1732–1738. <https://doi.org/10.7150/ijbs.45120>
- Lima, C. K. T., Carvalho, P. M. de M., Lima, I. de A. A. S., Nunes, J. V. A. de O., Saraiva, J. S., de Souza, R. I., ... Neto, M. L. R. (2020, May 1). The emotional impact of Coronavirus 2019-nCoV (new Coronavirus disease). *Psychiatry Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112915>
- Park, S. C., & Park, Y. C. (2020, February 1). Mental health care measures in response to the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak in Korea. *Psychiatry Investigation*. Korean Neuropsychiatric Association. <https://doi.org/10.30773/pi.2020.0058>
- Perla, M., & Morales, A. (2020, February 28). Se confirma primer caso de COVID-19 en México. *El Universal*. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/sociedad/coronavirus-en-mexico-confirman-primer-caso>
- Shah, K., Kamrai, D., Mekala, H., Mann, B., Desai, K., & Patel, R. S. (2020). Focus on mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: Applying learnings from the past outbreaks. *Cureus*, 12(3), e7405. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.7405>
- Shigemura, J., Ursano, R. J., Morganstein, J. C., Kurosawa, M., & Benedek, D. M. (2020). Public responses to the novel 2019 coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in Japan: Mental health consequences and target populations. *Psychiatry*

- and *Clinical Neurosciences*, 74(4), 281–282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pcn.12988>
- Torales, J., O'Higgins, M., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., & Ventriglio, A. (2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 coronavirus and its impact on global mental health. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020915212>
- WHO. (2020). #HealthyAtHome. Retrieved 11 May 2020, from [https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome?gclid=CjwKCAjw7-P1BRA2EiwAXoPWA3yT4bLmAA-tQXWwfujNEsHi8oM9on6ZnNDae4DQ9CcLn1iWxOrlOxoC9S8QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome?gclid=CjwKCAjw7-P1BRA2EiwAXoPWA3yT4bLmAA-tQXWwfujNEsHi8oM9on6ZnNDae4DQ9CcLn1iWxOrlOxoC9S8QAvD_BwE)
- Wind, T. R., Rijkeboer, M., Andersson, G., & Riper, H. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic: The 'black swan' for mental health care and a turning point for e-health. *Internet Interventions*, 20, 100317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2020.100317>
- Xiang, Y. T., Yang, Y., Li, W., Zhang, L., Zhang, Q., Cheung, T., & Ng, C. H. (2020). Timely mental health care for the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak is urgently needed. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(3), 228–229. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30046-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30046-8)
- Yu, V. (2020, April 16). What is a wet market? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/16/what-is-a-wet-market-coronavirus>